

1858

PASTORAL LETTER.

JOHN FARRELL,

By the GRACE OF GOD, and the appointment of the HOLY APOSTOLIC SEE,
Bishop of Hamilton, &c. &c.

To the Clergy, the Religious Communities, and all the Faithful of our Diocese, Health and Blessing
in Our LORD JESUS CHRIST.

The holy season of lent which is now commencing reminds us, D. B. B. of most serious and important duties imposed upon us, both pastors and people, namely: That of preaching and doing penance. Seated on the summit of the holy mountain, and inviting all nations into her pale, always faithful to her heavenly commission, our holy mother the church sends forth her divine instructions even to the utmost extremities of the earth; "their sound hath gone forth into all the earth."—Ps. 18: She carries in her hand the light of truth, and in her bosom the God of virtues, Jesus Christ, Himself who with his Holy Spirit, has promised to abide with her all days even to the consummation of the world. Deriving ever renewed life and action from the sacred fountains of His grace, and animated with these sentiments which His love inspires, she ever seeks the glory of His name and the establishment of His kingdom. She leads her children by the hand in the sweet and joyous path of virtue; she infuses into their souls pious longing after perfection, she turns away their eyes from transitory and perishable things to fix them upon the bright and glorious treasures of God's eternal kingdom, and when amidst the dangers which constantly beset their steps, they have the misfortune of closing their ears to her maternal admonitions and of falling into sin, she does not forsake them but, with the tenderness of her divine Master, she redoubles her exertions to bring them back to the path of virtue which they have forsaken.

Such, D. B. B., is her occupation during this holy time. Casting her eyes around her, on all sides she beholds a deluge of iniquity covering the face of the earth, and provoking God's wrath against the children of men. Wisting not the death of sinners, but their conversion, and spiritual life, she leaves nothing undone to call them to repentance. Using the inspired word of the prophet, she sounds the trumpet in Zion, inviting all, both young and old to sanctify a fast unto the Lord; she calls upon the bridegroom to go out of his bed, and the bride to forsake her bridal chamber; even her little ones, those who have not yet become acquainted with iniquity, are to take part in her general mortifications. The Priests, the ministers of the Lord, she calls upon to prostrate themselves in a suppliant posture, and with their cries and tears to beseech God to spare his people. "Between the porch and the altar, the priests, the Lord's ministers, shall weep and shall say, Spare, O Lord, spare thy people." (Joel 2, 17.)

Let us, beloved brethren, hearken to her voice. Let us embrace with courage and generosity this opportunity which the Lord in his mercy affords us of washing away all the defilements of sin, of satisfying the requirement of his justice and of being reinstated in our glorious prerogative of children of God and coheirs with Christ Jesus. This Lent may be one of the last graces which God in his unsearchable decrees has resolved to vouchsafe to us. On the manner in which we shall have spent it, may depend our lot for eternity. Let us humble ourselves and embrace the penance marked out for us by the church, as a work of necessity, in which all must take part, who will enter into the kingdom of Christ. "Do penance" cried out the holy precursor to the multitudes who assembled around him on the banks of the Jordan.— "Do penance, for the kingdom of God is at hand." These words he uttered in their hearing whilst he himself, by his fastings and austerities, showed forth in his person how that penance was to be performed.

Jesus Christ, born in poverty and privations, and having lived for thirty years in constant labour and humiliation, appears in public, and begins to promulgate his saving maxima. Penance is the first virtue which he preaches; its necessity is the first truth which he impresses upon the minds of his hearers. *Jesus began to preach saying: "do penance (St. Mark 4, 1st.) The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away, (St. Luke 9, 23.) Whosoever will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me," (St. Mark 1, 15.)* and again lest any one should consider himself exempted from the practice of penance, he says to every one of us: "Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish." (St. Luke 13 8.)

The Apostles, full of the maxims which the Divine Master had inculcated to them, went forth in accordance with the command which he had given, and preached everywhere, both before the Caesars of Rome and the Philosophers of Athens, both before the rich and the poor, the absolute necessity of works of penance. Do penance, says St. Peter, in his first sermon, every one of you, for the remission of your sins. (Acts, ii. 38.) St. Paul, miraculously converted on his way to Damascus, begins the work of penance by spending three days without either eating or drinking. (Acts ix. 9.) This spirit of penance accompanied him throughout the whole course of his Apostolic ministry, so that exhorting all those who would come to the knowledge of the truth, to works of penance, to the crucifying of the flesh, with all its vices and concupiscences in order to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, he points to himself without presumption as a model whom all might follow: "be ye my imitators, as I also am of Christ." (Co. 4, 16.)

The same doctrine has been always believed and preached in the Church. Penance is necessary for all, for the just that they may overcome their enemies, and for sinners that they may rise out of their sins, and satisfy the justice of God; To these especially we may apply the awful words of St. Augustine, "either penance or the torment of fire" *aut penitendum aut ardendum*. Shall we, D. B. B. with so many lessons, and such examples before us, refuse the penance imposed upon us during the coming weeks? Shall we abuse the graces which are prepared for us? Oh no! We will impress deeply upon our souls these words of our Divine Master: "Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish," and with holy fear and trembling at the thought of an eternal reprobation, but still more with sentiments of an ardent love for Him who first loved us, and did penance for us, we will embrace this time as one most acceptable; we will look upon these days as days of salvation. "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation," (2 Cor. 6, 2.) We will be careful not to harden our hearts by receiving the grace of God in vain. "To-day if you hear the voice of the Lord, harden not your hearts." (Ps.)

Let, then, D. B. B., the fast of Lent be performed so as to be worthy of the acceptance of Christ crucified. Break all your habits of sin; undertake a general combat against your predominant passions. Fly from those occasions where so often you have lost God's Grace,—abandon yourselves to the spirit of prayer and compunction. To your prayers and fasting add alms-deeds so much recommended in holy writ, as an atonement for sin and the obtaining of grace. "Prayer is good," said the angel of the Lord to Tobias, "with fasting and alms, more than to lay up treasures of gold"; turn not away your eyes from the poor and needy, who fill our towns and villages during these unhappy times; share with them the blessings which Providence has bestowed upon you; wipe away their tears, raise their drooping spirits, and, beholding with the eye of faith, our Divine Master himself in their person, administer to them that relief which your means will permit. As at this time the Church is assembled in prayer, devote yourselves with earnestness to this holy exercise, to which Christ has promised so many graces, both for time and eternity. Pray without intermission for your own spiritual wants, for the pastors whom God has placed over you; that the spirit of wisdom may always direct them in their work for your salvation. Pray for the conversion of sinners, for peace and good will among princes and nations, but always with an unshaken confidence in the promises of Him, who says: "Amen, amen, I say unto you, ask the Father any thing in

my name, he will give it you." (John 16, 28.) Finally, that our prayer, our mortification and our alms-deeds may be the more acceptable before the throne of God, let us always offer them up through the pure and immaculate hands of Mary, greeting her frequently, during these days, in the words of the Church: "Mary, help of Christians, pray for us."

If you enter into these sentiments, D. B. B., it will not be necessary for us to urge you by long discourses, by the threats of ecclesiastical censure, to approach the sacraments of penance and of the Holy Eucharist. Moved by the spirit which Christ pours out into the heart of all true penitents, especially during the holy season of Lent, you will run with ardour to the salutary bath of penance, there to wash your garments in the blood of the Lamb, to restore your souls to that primitive brightness and beauty which they lost in the path of iniquity, and afterwards to sit down to the table of the Lord and there to be nourished with His most precious body and blood.

REGULATIONS FOR LENT.

THE REGULATIONS FOR LENT, IN THIS DIOCESE, ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- 1.—All the days of Lent, Sundays excepted, are days of fast and abstinence.
- 2.—The use of flesh meat is allowed once a day on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays; (the first Thursday and all holy week excepted.) On Sundays flesh meat is allowed without restriction as to the number of times; and also on the three aforesaid days to those whom age or hard work dispense from fasting. (*Resp. see penitentiariae*)
- 3.—Flesh and fish are not to be used at the same meal.
- 4.—Lard is tolerated for cooking, (especially for the poor.)
- 5.—In the evening a small collation is allowed, (say about one-fourth of a meal,) at which eggs, butter and cheese may be used.
- 6.—Are exempted from fasting, persons under 21 years, mothers bearing or suckling children, as well as those whom great age, infirmity or hard work would not permit to fast without great inconvenience; in doubt, counsel is to be taken from your confessor or physician.
- 7.—The paschal time commences on Ash-Wednesday and closes on Trinity Sunday.
This pastoral shall be read in all the Churches during Mass, in Chapter, and in all the religious communities, as well as in all the stations throughout the Diocese the first Sunday, or other convenient day, after its reception.

Given at our Episcopal residence, in Hamilton, on the feast of St. Titus, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty-eight, under our hand and seal and the countersign of our Secretary.

† JOHN, Bishop of Hamilton.

By His Lordship's Command,

A. CARAYON, Sec'y.

